

MICROMECHANICAL RESONATOR DEVICE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefits of U.S. provisional patent applications Serial No. 60/227,503 filed August 24, 2000 and entitled "Geometric Stress-Compensated Temperature-Insensitive Micromechanical Resonators" and Serial No. 60/227,507 also filed August 24, 2000 and entitled "Process Technology For Lateral Small-Gap Micromechanical Structures."

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

The invention was made with Government support under DARPA Contract No. F30602-97-2-0101. The Government has certain rights in the invention.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to micromechanical resonator devices.

2. Background Art

Recent advances in micromachining technology that yield high-*Q* microscale mechanical resonators may soon enable substantial size and potential cost reductions for the highly stable oscillators used in communication and timekeeper applications. In particular, IC-compatible surface-micromachined mechanical resonators from MF to VHF frequencies with *Q*'s in excess of 10,000 have been demonstrated in polycrystalline silicon structural materials. Prototype high-*Q* oscillators featuring micromechanical (or " μ mechanical") resonators integrated together with sustaining electronics, all in a single chip, using a planar process that

combines surface-micromachining and integrated circuits, have also been demonstrated. Unfortunately, although the Q of the resonators in these oscillators is sufficient to garner respectable short-term stability, their thermal stability falls well short of the needed specifications, typically exhibiting frequency variations on 5 the order of 1870 ppm over a 0°C to 85°C range, as shown in Figure 1, which compares the performance of a polysilicon folded beam μ mechanical resonator with that of AT-cut quartz. Although techniques exist to alleviate this thermal dependence (e.g., temperature compensation circuitry, or oven control), all of them consume significant amounts of power, and thus, reduce the battery lifetime of 10 portable devices.

In the article entitled "Geometric Stress Compensation for Enhanced Thermal Stability in Micromechanical Resonators" W.-T. Hsu et al., ULTRAS. SYMP., 1998, pp. 945-948, a geometric stress-compensation design technique is disclosed with respect to low-frequency (LF, e.g., 80 kHz) nickel folded-beam 15 μ mechanical resonators that used a geometrically-tailored stress versus temperature function to cancel the thermal dependence of the material Young's modulus, resulting in an overall lower frequency excursion over a given temperature range, and generating zero temperature coefficient TC_{fo} points in the process.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

20 An object of the present invention is to provide an improved micromechanical resonator device.

In carrying out the above objects and other objects of the present invention, a temperature-compensated, micromechanical resonator device is provided. The device includes a substrate, a flexural-mode resonator having first 25 and second ends, and a temperature-compensating support structure anchored to the substrate to support the resonator at the first and second ends above the substrate. Both the resonator and a support structure are dimensioned and positioned relative to one another so that the resonator has enhanced thermal stability.

Energy losses to the substrate may be substantially reduced to allow higher resonator device Q.

The support structure may not vibrate during vibration of the resonator.

5 The device may further include a drive electrode structure formed on the substrate at a position to allow electrostatic excitation of the resonator. The resonator and the drive electrode structure define a first gap therebetween which is preferably a submicron lateral capacitive gap.

10 The device may further include a sense electrode structure formed on the substrate at a position to sense output current based on motion of the resonator. The resonator and the sense electrode define a second gap therebetween which is preferably a submicron lateral capacitive gap.

The resonator is preferably a single resonator beam.

15 The support structure may include an anchor for rigidly anchoring the first end of the resonator to the substrate and a folding truss support structure for substantially decoupling the second end of the resonator from the substrate.

20 The resonator is preferably a lateral resonator. The support structure may include a pair of stress generating support members dimensioned relative to the resonator so that the resonator has enhanced thermal stability. The support members may be rigid against lateral motions.

The resonator may be a polysilicon resonator such as a polysilicon resonator beam.

The electrode structures may be metal such as plated metal electrodes.

The substrate may be a semiconductor substrate such as a silicon substrate.

Further in carrying out the above objects and other objects of the present invention, a micromechanical resonator device having a frequency versus 5 temperature curve is provided. The device includes a substrate, a flexural-mode resonator having first and second ends, and a support structure separate from the resonator and anchored to the substrate to support the resonator at the first and second ends above the substrate. Both the resonator and a support structure are dimensioned and positioned relative to one another so that the frequency versus 10 temperature curve is specifically tailored.

Such tailoring may increase temperature dependence of the resonator so that the device may be used as a temperature sensor.

Such tailoring may introduce peaks and valleys in the curve at predetermined locations.

15 Still further in carrying out the above objects and other objects of the present invention, a micromechanical resonator device is provided. The device includes a substrate, a flexural-mode resonator having first and second ends, and a support structure separate from the resonator and anchored to the substrate to support the resonator at the first and second ends above the substrate. Both the resonator and a support structure are dimensioned and positioned relative to one another so that the device has a substantially zero temperature coefficient 20 temperature at which the device may be biased.

25 The micromechanical resonator device disclosed herein offers a method for negating the above thermal dependencies without the need for additional power consumption. In cases where power is not a large concern, the temperature-insensitive design technique of this disclosure can be combined with temperature compensating or oven-control circuits to attain thermal stabilities superior to those achievable via present-day macroscopic resonators at a given power level.

The above object and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention are readily apparent from the following detailed description of the best mode for carrying out the invention when taken in connection with the accompanying drawings.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGURE 1 shows graphs or plots of fractional frequency change versus temperature for an equal-folded beam polysilicon μ mechanical resonator and AT-cut quartz crystals with various cut angles;

10 FIGURE 2a is a perspective schematic view of a temperature-insensitive micromechanical resonator device constructed in accordance with the present invention, indicating major components and dimensions;

FIGURE 2b is a schematic view, partially broken away and in cross-section, of an off-axis anchor design that substantially eliminates beam bending;

15 FIGURE 3a is a side sectional schematic view of an insulation layer comprising oxide and nitride layers formed on a substrate, a patterned polysilicon layer and a sacrificial oxide layer deposited thereon;

FIGURE 3b is a side sectional schematic view of the layers of Figure 1a after opening for anchors are formed, a patterned polysilicon layer within the openings and in the field and a gap sacrificial oxide deposited thereon;

20 FIGURE 3c is a side sectional schematic view of the sacrificial oxide after etching and with an evaporated seed layer together with the structures of Figure 1b;

FIGURE 3d is a side sectional schematic view of a thick photoresist for planarization etch back which has been spun on the structures of Figure 1c;

FIGURE 3e is a side sectional schematic view with the PR etched back to the top of the structures and the seed layer etched on the top of the structures;

5 FIGURE 3f is a side sectional schematic view of the structures of Figure 1e after the PR is stripped, a PR plating mold is formed and Au electrodes are plated;

FIGURE 3g is a side sectional schematic view of the structures of Figure 1f with the PR mold stripped, the seed layers removed and an Ni layer formed on the electrodes;

10 FIGURE 3h is a side sectional schematic view of the structures of Figure 1g after HF release and the Ni layer removed;

FIGURE 4 is a frequency spectrum of a 13 MHz version of a resonator of the present invention measured under $50\mu\text{Torr}$ vacuum ($Q \sim 11,000$); and

15 FIGURE 5 shows graphs or plots of fractional frequency change versus temperature for a 13 MHz resonator of the present invention with varying L_1/L_2 beam ratios.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The disclosed resonator is designed to vibrate in a flexural-mode, for 20 which temperature dependence is dominated by the following factors: (1) stress changes due to thermal expansion or contraction of *clamped* beams; (2) Young's modulus temperature dependence; and (3) dimensional changes due to thermal expansion or contraction of *released* beams. Of the above causes, Young's modulus and stress variations with temperature have the strongest impact on resonance 25 frequency. For the majority of current resonator designs, these two causes combine to yield a monotonically decreasing resonance frequency versus temperature curve.

For example, the resonance frequency of a phosphorous-doped polysilicon clamped-clamped beam resonator has a negative Young's modulus temperature coefficient (TC_p) and a negative TC_f due to clamped-beam expansion. These TC_f 's add to yield a net negative temperature coefficient.

5 The high- Q , temperature-insensitive micromechanical resonator device of the present invention takes advantage of strategic geometric design to introduce stresses caused by thermal expansion or compression that oppose and cancel frequency changes brought about by the temperature-dependence of the Young's modulus, resulting in a smaller overall frequency excursion over a given
10 temperature range. In some cases, this method also transforms the original monotonically-decreasing-resonance-frequency-versus-temperature-curve to a U- or S-shaped curve (or still a linear curve), with a smaller overall frequency excursion over a given temperature range, and with points at which the resonance frequency TC_f is zero.

15 Figure 2a presents a schematic of a simplified version of the above-described temperature-insensitive μ resonator device, generally indicated at 10, including a substrate 11. As shown, the device 10 comprises a clamped-clamped beam resonator 12 having ends 13 supported by a folded support structure, generally indicated at 14; strategically designed so that an increase in temperature
20 gives rise to tension in the resonator beam 12, which increases the resonator resonance frequency and opposes decreases in frequency caused by Young's modulus temperature dependence. The support structure 14 has an anchor 15 to anchor one end 13 of the beam 12 to the substrate 11 above a ground plane 17.

25 Briefly, the folded support structure 14 includes outer support beams 16a connected by a truss beam 16b. The opposite end 13 of the beam 12 is supported by the beam 16b in a state more decoupled from the substrate 11 than the end 13 directly anchored to the substrate 11.

The outer support beams 16a are designed to be longer than the resonator beam 12 (*i.e.* $L_2 > L_1$), and thus, will expand faster than it with increasing

temperature, giving rise to net tension in the resonator beam 12. Again, this tension contributes to a cancelling of temperature coefficients that gives rise to a smaller resonance frequency excursion over the temperature range of interest. Extension of these concepts to folded-beam, comb-driven resonators is straightforward.

5 Metal or polysilicon electrodes including a drive electrode 18 and a sense electrode 19 allow lateral resonance operation of the device 10.

10 To ensure only the resonator beam 12 vibrates when excitation signals are applied to the drive electrode 18, the outer support beams 16a are made much wider than the resonator beam (*i.e.* $W_2 > W_1$) making them rigid against lateral motions.

15 Figure 2b shows a modified anchor design for a beam 12' including anchors 15' (only one of three are shown) that substantially eliminate beam bending. The anchors 15' redirect top-to-bottom side expansion differences so that they occur only in a direction orthogonal to the length of the resonator (or support) beam, thus, eliminating beam bending along the length of the beam 12'.

10 MHz Temperature-Insensitive Resonators

20 Polysilicon versions of the design of Figure 2 have been fabricated and tested including a 13 MHz version of such a resonator. The fabrication technology used to attain this device utilized a combination of conventional polysilicon surface-micromachining with plated metal electrodes to allow lateral resonance operation. As such, the device represents a successful merging of polysilicon technology with the metal plating technologies.

25 A preferred embodiment for a small-gap, lateral resonator process flow is presented in Figures 3a - 3h. As shown in Figure 3a, this process starts with a $2\mu\text{m}$ thick oxide film 110 (*i.e.* SiO_2) thermally grown on a silicon substrate 112 and a 3000\AA thick film 114 of nitride (*i.e.* Si_3N_4) which together serve as an isolation layer. After a 3000\AA thick low stress polysilicon layer 116 is deposited

via LPCVD and patterned via reactive ion etching (RIE), a 5000Å thick layer 118 of sacrificial oxide (*i.e.* SiO₂) is deposited by LPCVD.

As shown in Figure 3b, vias 120 are patterned into the sacrificial oxide layer 118 by RIE, exposing the underlying polysilicon layer 116 in specific areas to later serve as anchors for eventual structures. A 2μm thick structural layer 5 of low stress polysilicon is then deposited via LPCVD and patterned also via RIE to form anchor structures 122 and a resonator structure 123 with straight side walls. A 1000Å thick layer 124 of conformal LPCVD oxide is then deposited in order to define the small-gap spacing of the present invention.

10. As shown in Figure 3c, the sacrificial oxide layer 118 is then etched (RIE and wet etch) until the isolation nitride layer 114 is exposed at regions where metal electrodes are to be formed. A thin metal layer (Cr200Å/Au300Å/Cr200Å) is then evaporated over all areas of the wafer to serve as a seed layer 126 for electrode plating. The top Cr layer is used to enhance the adhesion between the seed layer 126 and a plating mold while the bottom Cr layer is for the adhesion 15 between Au and the underneath nitride layer 114.

20. As shown in Figure 3d, in order not to plate metal on top of the structures 122 and 123 while forming the electrode, a thick layer 128 of photoresist (PR) is spun on. Then, the layer 128 is planarized and etched back via RIE to expose the seed metal layer 126 on top of the structures 122 and 123 as shown in Figure 3e. The seed layer 126 on top of the structures 122 and 123 is then removed by wet etching to prevent metal from plating over the tops of the polysilicon structures 122 and 123 during subsequent electroplating steps.

25. As shown in Figure 3f, after the rest of the PR is removed, a plating PR mold 130 is formed by lithography, Cr on top of the seed layer 126 is removed and then Au electrodes 132 are plated on the exposed Au seed layer 126 between vertical side walls of the resonator structure 123 and the photoresist mold 130 which define the electrode plating boundaries.

As shown in Figure 3g, a thin layer 134 of Ni is plated on the electrodes 132 in order to protect the surface of the Au electrode regions while the seed layer 126 is being removed.

Figure 3g shows the PR mold 130 and the seed layer 126 removed.

5 As shown in Figure 3h, the layer 134 of Ni is removed and finally, the resonator structure 124 separated by sub-micron gaps 138 between two metal electrodes 122 is free to move after HF release.

4 The measured frequency spectrum for the device is shown in Figure 10 4. The Q extracted from this plot is close to 11,000, which is high enough to attain good phase noise performance in an oscillator using this resonator.

5 Figure 5 presents a plot of fractional frequency change versus temperature for the 13 MHz resonator with varying L_1/L_2 beam ratios (see Figure 2). From this plot, control of the temperature variation can clearly be seen. In particular, for L_1/L_2 beam ratios from 40/30 to 40/50, the temperature coefficient decreases. However, for higher beam ratios, the temperature coefficient degrades. This can be explained via a mechanism where the support beams bend upwards or downwards when the stress in the beams becomes larger for devices with large L_1/L_2 beam ratios. These support problems can be alleviated using stiffening structures to prevent out-of-plane movements of the supports. In some cases, however, 15 bending of supports can actually help to decrease the temperature coefficient, so 20 bending of supports is not always detrimental.

Benefits accruing to the invention are numerous. For example, the main advantages and contributions of this invention are:

25 (i) A method for greatly reducing the temperature coefficient of a micromechanical resonator's resonance frequency without the need for power consumption and using only a single layer of structural material;

5 (ii) A method for controlling the frequency of a micromechanical resonator as a function of temperature. This feature can be extremely useful in a variety of circuits that expect the resonator to have a pre-defined temperature response; and

(iii) A possible method for controlling the Q of a micromechanical resonator as a function of temperature. This comes about because stress in a beam also affects the Q of a micromechanical resonator.

10 The present invention provides a general design technique in which geometric stresses that change as a function of temperature are used to influence the resonance frequency of a micromechanical resonator for the purposes of controlling the frequency versus temperature characteristic of a micromechanical resonator. Furthermore, the present invention uses a geometric design that gives a substantially flat frequency versus temperature curve.

15 The above-described geometric-stress design technique is not limited only to temperature compensation, but can also be used to more generally tailor the frequency versus temperature curve for any mechanical resonator device. For example, the support structure might be designed to increase the temperature dependence of the resonator for use as a temperature sensor. Or the temperature 20 curve might be tailored to have peaks and valleys in certain predefined locations.

While embodiments of the invention have been illustrated and described, it is not intended that these embodiments illustrate and describe all possible forms of the invention. Rather, the words used in the specification are words of description rather than limitation, and it is understood that various changes may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.